

PATENT APPLICATION

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re the Application of

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ARKNÆS-PEDERSEN

Application No.: New U.S. Patent Application

Filed: April 1, 1999

Docket No.: 103175

For: A METHOD AND AN APPARATUS FOR PROCESSING AUSCULTATION SIGNALS

JC518 U.S. PTO
09/283587
04/01/99



CLAIM FOR PRIORITY

Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

Sir:

The benefit of the filing date of the following prior foreign application filed in the following foreign country is hereby requested for the above-identified patent application and the priority provided in 35 U.S.C. §119 is hereby claimed:

Danish Patent Application No. 0517/98 filed April 8, 1998

In support of this claim, a certified copy of said original foreign application:

X is filed herewith.

 was filed on in Parent Application No. filed .

It is requested that the file of this application be marked to indicate that the requirements of 35 U.S.C. §119 have been fulfilled and that the Patent and Trademark Office kindly acknowledge receipt of this document.

Respectfully submitted,



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Kongeriget Danmark

Patent application No.: 0517/98

Date of filing: 08 Apr 1998

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This is to certify the correctness of the following information:

The attached photocopy is a true copy of the following document:

- The specification, claims, abstract and drawings as filed with the application on the filing date indicated above.

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TAASTRUP 30 Mar 1999

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1C518 U.S. PTO
09/283587
04/01/99

Rhythm Estimator (Rytmeestimator).

This invention relates to an apparatus for processing auscultation signals, comprising a bias processor for receiving an auscultation signal and providing a biased auscultation signal; said bias processor comprising an envelope detector; an estimator for calculating a signal representative of an estimated rhythm of the auscultation signal.

10

In recent years physicians have had an impressive arsenal of instrumentation at their disposal for the diagnosis of cardiovascular diseases. One such instrument is the well known stethoscope used to detect sounds originating from the heart and adjacent large vessels. With the introduction of the stethoscope, auscultation grew into an art providing the clinician with valuable information of the functional integrity of the heart. Nowadays it is possible to process the information residing in the auscultation signal electronically by use of embedded knowledge obtained by clinical research. Therefore it is possible to relieve the clinician from trivial tasks. One such task may be to estimate the heart rate of a beating heart based on the auscultation signal.

25

The auscultation signal comprises characteristic sounds that originate from the contraction and expansion of the heart in the process of pumping blood, i.e. sounds caused by vibrations from acceleration and deceleration of blood. When a beating heart is auscultated it is not the beat frequency that is heard, but rather the characteristic sounds. Further, for mid-aged healthy persons in normal conditions, the characteristic sounds denoted S1 and S2 related to a contraction and expansion of the heart, respectively, are separated in time by a sufficiently large interval that allows for perception of the charac-

teristic sounds as individual sounds, i.e. the characteristic sounds, are typically separated by more than 150-200 milliseconds for adults and about 50 milliseconds for children. Typically, the characteristic sounds have a 5 continuous frequency spectrum distributed between approximately 15 Hz and 100 Hz and peaking at 30-40Hz.

However, the characteristic sounds may be superimposed with sounds originating from different types of vibrations in the heart. These sounds are the so-called murmurs, that may be caused by mechanisms such as blood turbulence or flutter of structures. Murmurs may be divided into two primary groups: a first group comprise random 'noisy' sounds and a second group comprise 'musical' 10 sounds with a continuous narrow-band frequency spectrum. Experience has shown that in a human being the 'musical' sounds are typically related to the heart beat frequency. The frequency spectrum of murmurs may be distributed up 15 to 500-2000Hz.

20 The characteristic sounds may also be disturbed by spurious contractions of the heart appearing at certain or random points in time. Further, the characteristic sounds may also appear at random points in time. This phenomenon 25 is known as arrhythmia.

When the sound of a beating heart including murmurs, if any, is auscultated by means of a transducer placed on e.g. the chest of a patient, then low-frequent rumble 30 noise will be picked up by the transducer. This rumble noise may have a frequency content primarily distributed from just below the frequency of the heart rate towards DC.

35 In severe cases these disturbances are able to destroy the characteristic sounds in the auscultation signal com-

pletely or at least disturb the auscultation signal to such a degree that it may be impossible to estimate even an approximated heart rate by use of the prior art technology.

5

However, the human perception of the auscultation signal is very good at diminishing the disturbances or artefacts and pay attention to the features in the auscultation signal that provides information for estimating the heart 10 rate. Thereby it is superior to the prior art technology in the above mentioned severe cases.

This is because the human hearing system enhances high frequencies relative to low frequencies in the frequency 15 range of interest i.e. below approximately 2000Hz. The human perception of sound amplitudes may be modelled by means of A-weighing. A-weighing may be approximated as a second order band-pass filter with a centre frequency of 2000Hz. Thereby it reduces the low frequency rumble noise 20 and enhances the high frequency components providing well defined information of the relative location of the characteristic sounds with respect to time. This well defined information in the form of characteristic heart sounds is easily recognizable from repetition to repetition and 25 therefore easy to count. However, the value of the human hearing system has not been taken into account in the signal processing used in systems for estimating the heart rate automatically. This may be due to the prejudice that enhancement of the relative high frequencies in 30 the human hearing system also enhances noise and thereby decreases the signal-to-noise ratio.

US patent 4,972,841 discloses an electronic stethoscope with a pulse rate display for displaying an estimated 35 pulse rate. In the stethoscope a transducer converts so-called Korotkoff sounds into electrical signals.

Korotkoff sounds are sounds created by vibrating walls of collapsed vessels as blood is just allowed to flow through the vessel. The electrical signals are amplified and fed to a counter in which the detected pulse rate per 5 unit time is calculated and the result is displayed as a digital pulse rate.

However, this patent is not concerned with estimation of heart rates originating from humans where the measured 10 sound may be very different from expected normal heart sounds. The patent does not disclose any means adapted to suppress artefacts that may be confused with or mixed up with the information in the auscultation signal relating to the heart rate.

15 US patent 4,436,096 discloses a digital heart rate stethoscope. A transducer produces electrical signals representing the heart sound of a human patient and a filter is connected to receive the electrical signals. 20 The filter is a narrow-band band-pass filter whose pass-band is centered on a characteristic heart sound frequency e.g. 33 Hz. The filter is thereby adapted to improve the signal-to-noise ratio and enables the transducer to be used over a patient's clothing. The filtered 25 signal is converted into pulses which are counted in a counter and displayed as a digital heart rate indication.

Again, this patent is not concerned with estimation of heart rates originating from humans where the measured 30 sound may be very different from the expected normal heart sounds. Neither does this patent disclose any means adapted to suppress artefacts that may be confused with or mixed up with the information in the auscultation signal relating to the heart rate.

International Application WO 97/00045 discloses a stethoscope for examining the characteristic of sound waves made by a beating heart. The stethoscope comprises means for establishing a threshold wave form beyond which cyclic reference complexes appear and are identified, and a time measurement device for measuring the time elapsed between similar moments on adjacent reference complexes as an indicator of rate of heart beat.

10 In this stethoscope the heart rate is estimated based on the assumption that there is substantially no noise between the heart sounds originating from contraction and expansion of the heart. The stethoscope is therefore not suited for use of estimating heart rates of persons suffering from heart murmur or arrhythmia.

15 Other apparatuses for estimating the heart rate use means for determining the envelope of the auscultation signal. The envelope is determined by taking the absolute value of the auscultation signal and band-pass filtering the absolute value signal.

20 From the prior art it is clear that there is not disclosed any method or apparatus that uses the knowledge of characteristic features for typical auscultation signals where murmurs and arrhythmia may be present, in order to obtain a more precise and robust heart rate estimation. Further, the strength of the bias provided by the human hearing system in the perception of auscultation signals 25 is not used in the prior art in an apparatus for relieving the clinician of the trivial task of calculating the heart rate.

30 The primary object of the invention is to provide an apparatus for processing auscultation signals in order to extract information representative of the rhythm of a

beating heart such that random noise and spontaneous artefacts are suppressed.

This is achieved, when the apparatus is characterised in 5 that the estimator is adapted for selecting a part of the biased auscultation signal and measuring the conformity between the part of the biased auscultation signal and the entire auscultation signal.

10 Consequently, it is possible to suppress artefacts in the auscultation signal that may be confused or mixed up with the information relating to the heart rate due to an overlap of the frequency spectrum of the artefacts and the frequency spectrum of the heart rate information. 15 There is thereby obtained a signal in which the heart rate is very well defined.

In an expedient apparatus for processing auscultation signals, the estimator calculates a cross-correlation 20 function. This cross-correlation function supplies a well-defined signal having large signal values at good conformity and small signal values at poor conformity.

When the part of the biased auscultation signal represents one of a succession of cycles of the biased auscultation signal, the part may represent a reference cycle 25 that is found ideal in some aspects.

The apparatus may further comprise a post processor 30 adapted for locating extreme values in the signal representing the conformity of the biased auscultation signal. Hereby, the points in time in which the extreme values are located may be a direct measure of the rhythm.

35 When the post processor is further adapted for validating the quality of the signal representing the conformity of

the biased auscultation signal, then the quality of the estimated rhythm may be taken into consideration when the estimated rhythm rate is interpreted.

- 5 The quality may be validated by verifying at least one of the following three items:
 - a) time differences between located extreme values must be within predetermined limits;
 - b) minimum and maximum time differences in proportion to the mean of the time differences must be within predetermined limits;
 - c) the magnitude of the result of the correlation at the extreme values location must be within predetermined limits.
- 15 Then a preferred quality level may be defined by means of the preferred limits that are related directly to the statistics of rhythm estimation.

20 The bias processor may comprise a filter for calculating an A-weighted version of the auscultation signal or an approximated A-weighted version of the auscultation signal. Simulations have shown that an A-weighted version of the auscultation signal comprises sufficient information to estimate the heart rate in a consistent way in a variety of situations.

25 When the A-weighted version of the auscultation signal is calculated by means of an approximation corresponding to a double differentiation of the auscultation signal in a predetermined frequency range, the filtering process requires a minimum of computational effort.

30 The bias processor may comprise an envelope detector for calculating a first envelope signal representing the envelope of the A-weighted version of the auscultation signal. This is expedient because the envelope signal of the

A-weighted version of the auscultation signal comprises information that is very feasible for estimating the heart rate even when murmurs are present in the auscultation signal.

5

When the bias processor comprises an envelope detector for calculating a second envelope signal representing the envelope of the auscultation signal, the envelope signal of the auscultation signal is very feasible for estimating the heart rate when murmurs are not present in the auscultation signal.

10 The bias processor may comprise an adaptive band-pass filter for filtering the envelope signals; said band-pass filter at least having an upper and a lower pass-band, respectively, to select from; said adaptive band-pass filter comprising a controller selecting the lower pass-band when a relatively large fraction of a signal input to the band-pass filter is low-frequent, and selecting the upper pass-band when a relatively low fraction of a signal input to the band-pass filter is low-frequent. Thus, it is possible to estimate the rhythm in the auscultation signal over a relatively wide range of frequencies while it is avoided that the signal-to-noise ratio 15 is ruined, i.e. it is possible preserve a relatively narrow pass-band of the band-pass filter.

20 The bias processor may comprise means for combining the envelope signals or the band-pass filtered envelope signals; said means comprising auto-scaling means and summation means providing the biased auscultation signal. It is thereby possible to combine differently biased signals in order to estimate the heart rate of a broader spectrum 25 of types of auscultation signals.

The auscultation signal may comprise samples that arrive at a sample rate, and the apparatus may comprise a synchronous processor operating at a rate corresponding to the sample rate, and further comprising an asynchronous processor operating at time intervals that are initiated by a request. Hereby, it is possible to acquire new samples of the auscultation signal in real time while a correlation function operating on prior sample values of the auscultation signal is calculated.

A second object of the invention is to provide an apparatus for processing auscultation signals in order to extract information relating to the repeated interdependent contraction and expansion of a beating heart, such that the information in the characteristic sounds and in murmurs related to the heart rate are enhanced.

This is achieved, when the apparatus is characterised in that the bias processor comprises a filter having a frequency response corresponding to an A-weighing or an approximated A-weighing, at least for a frequency range of interest.

Consequently, it is possible to estimate the heart rate of a beating heart, based on the characteristic sounds of the beating heart and murmurs related to the heart rate. Thus, the heart rate may be estimated based on murmurs relating to the heart rate if the characteristic sounds do not provide sufficient information for estimating the heart rate.

When the auscultation signal is filtered with a filter having a frequency response corresponding to a double differentiation, the computational effort required to calculate the A-weighted version of the auscultation is reduced.

The frequency range of interest may span the frequency range below 2000Hz. The characteristic heart sounds and murmurs related to the heart rate comprise frequency components located in this frequency range and provide sufficient information in this range for estimating the rhythm of a beating heart.

5 In an expedient apparatus for processing auscultation signals, the estimator is adapted for selecting a part of the biased auscultation signal and measuring the conformity between the part of the biased auscultation signal and the entire auscultation signal.

10 15 In an expedient apparatus for processing auscultation signals, the estimator calculates a cross-correlation function. This cross-correlation function supplies a well-defined signal having large signal values at good conformity and small signal values at poor conformity.

20 When the part of the biased auscultation signal represents one of a succession of cycles of the biased auscultation signal, the part may represent a reference cycle that is found ideal in some aspects.

25 30 The apparatus may further comprise a post processor adapted for locating extreme values in the signal representing the conformity of the biased auscultation signal. Hereby, the points in time in which the extreme values are located may be a direct measure of the heart rate.

35 This is feasible in particular when the post processor is further adapted for validating the quality of the signal representing the conformity of the biased auscultation signal. The quality of the estimated heart rate may

hereby be taken into consideration when the estimated heart rate is interpreted.

The quality may be validated by verifying at least one of 5 the following three items:

- a) time differences between located extreme values must be within predetermined limits;
- b) minimum and maximum time differences in proportion to the mean of the time differences must be within predetermined limits;
- c) the magnitude of the result of the correlation at the extreme values location must be within predetermined limits.

Then a preferred quality level may be defined by means of 15 the preferred limits that is related directly to the statistics of rhythm estimation.

The bias processor may comprise an envelope detector for calculating a first envelope signal representing the envelope of the A-weighted version of the auscultation signal. This is expedient because the envelope signal of the A-weighted version of the auscultation signal comprises information that is very feasible for estimating the heart rate even when murmurs are present in the auscultation signal. 25

When the bias processor comprises an envelope detector for calculating a second envelope signal representing the envelope of the auscultation signal, the envelope signal 30 of the auscultation signal is very feasible for estimating the heart rate when murmurs are not present in the auscultation signal.

The bias processor may comprise an adaptive band-pass 35 filter for filtering the envelope signals; said band-pass filter at least having an upper and a lower pass-band,

respectively, to select from; said adaptive band-pass filter comprising a controller selecting the lower pass-band when a relatively large fraction of a signal input to the band-pass filter is low-frequent, and selecting 5 the upper pass-band when a relatively low fraction of a signal input to the band-pass filter is low-frequent. Thus, it is possible to estimate the rhythm in the auscultation signal over a relatively wide range of frequencies while it is avoided that the signal-to-noise ratio 10 is ruined, i.e. it is possible preserve a relatively narrow pass-band of the band-pass filter.

The bias processor may comprise means for combining the envelope signals or the band-pass filtered envelope signals; 15 said means comprising auto-scaling means and summation means providing the biased auscultation signal. It is thereby possible to combine differently biased signals in order to estimate the heart rate of a broader spectrum of types of auscultation signals.

20 The auscultation signal may comprise samples that arrive at a sample rate and the apparatus may comprise a synchronous processor operating at a rate corresponding to the sample rate, and further comprising an asynchronous processor operating at time intervals that are initiated 25 by a request. Hereby, it is possible to acquire new samples of the auscultation signal in real time while a correlation function operating on prior sample values of the auscultation signal is calculated.

30 A third object of the invention is to provide a method for processing auscultation signals in order to extract 35 information representative of the rhythm of a beating heart such that random noise and spontaneous artefacts are suppressed.

The quality may be validated by verifying at least one of the following three items:

- a) time differences between located extreme values must be within predetermined limits;
- 5 b) minimum and maximum time differences in proportion to the mean of the time differences must be within predetermined limits;
- c) the magnitude of the result of the correlation at the extreme values location must be within predetermined

10 limits.

Then a preferred quality level may be defined by means of the preferred limits that are related directly to the statistics of rhythm estimation.

15 The method may further comprise the step of calculating an A-weighted version of the auscultation signal or an approximated A-weighted version of the auscultation signal. Simulations have shown that an A-weighted version of the auscultation signal comprises sufficient information

20 to estimate the heart rate in a consistent way in a variety of situations.

When the A-weighted version of the auscultation signal is calculated by means of an approximation corresponding to

25 a double differentiation of the auscultation signal, the filtering process requires a minimum of computational effort.

The method may comprise the step of calculating a first

30 envelope signal representing the envelope of the A-weighted version of the auscultation signal. This is expedient because the envelope signal of the A-weighted version of the auscultation signal comprises information that is very feasible for estimating the heart rate even

35 when murmurs are present in the auscultation signal.

When the method further comprises the step of calculating a second envelope signal representing the envelope of the auscultation signal, the envelope signal of the auscultation signal is very feasible for estimating the heart rate when murmurs are not present in the auscultation signal.

The method may further comprise the step of filtering the envelope signals by means of a band-pass filter; said band-pass filter at least having an upper and a lower pass-band respectively selectable; said adaptive band-pass filter being controlled such that the lower pass-band is selected when a relatively large fraction of a signal input to the band-pass filter is low-frequent and such that the upper pass-band is selected when a relatively low fraction of a signal input to the band-pass filter is low-frequent. Thus, it is possible to estimate the rhythm in the auscultation signal over a relatively wide range of frequencies while it is avoided that the signal-to-noise ratio is ruined, i.e. it is possible preserve a relatively narrow pass-band of the band-pass filter.

The method may further comprise the steps of auto-scaling the envelope signals and adding the auto-scaled envelope signals in order provide the biased auscultation signal. It is thereby possible to combine differently biased signals in order to estimate the heart rate of a broader spectrum of types of auscultation signals.

The auscultation signal may comprise samples that arrive at a sample rate and in that the method comprises synchronous steps being executed at a rate corresponding to the sample rate, and further comprising asynchronous steps operating at time intervals that are initiated by a

request. Hereby, it is possible to acquire new samples of the auscultation signal in real time while a correlation function operating on prior sample values of the auscultation signal is calculated.

5

A fourth object of the invention is to provide a method for processing auscultation signals in order to extract information relating to the repeated interdependent contraction and expansion of a beating heart, such that the 10 information in the characteristic sounds and in murmurs related to the heart rate are enhanced.

This is achieved, when the method is characterised in that the signal representative of the estimated rhythm is 15 calculated by means of a filter having a frequency response corresponding to an A-weighing or an approximated A-weighing, at least for a frequency range of interest.

Consequently, it is possible to estimate the heart rate 20 of a beating heart, based on the characteristic sounds of the beating heart and murmurs related to the heart rate. Thus, the heart rate may be estimated based on murmurs relating to the heart rate if the characteristic sounds do not provide sufficient information for estimating the 25 heart rate.

When the frequency response is obtained by means of a double differentiation, the computational effort required to calculate the A-weighted version of the auscultation 30 is reduced.

The frequency range of interest may span the frequency range below 2000Hz. The characteristic heart sounds and murmurs related to the heart rate comprise frequency components located in this frequency range and provide suf- 35

ficient information in this range for estimating the rhythm of a beating heart.

5 In an expedient method for processing auscultation signals the method comprises the step of selecting a part of the biased auscultation signal and measuring the conformity between the part of the biased auscultation signal and the entire auscultation signal.

10 In an expedient apparatus for processing auscultation signals, the method calculates a cross-correlation function. This cross-correlation function supplies a well-defined signal having large signal values at good conformity and small signal values at poor conformity.

15 When the part of the biased auscultation signal represents one of a succession of cycles of the biased auscultation signal, the part may represent a reference cycle that is found ideal in some aspects.

20 The method may further comprise the step of locating extreme values in the signal representing the conformity of the biased auscultation signal. Hereby, the points in time in which the extreme values are located may be a direct measure of the heart rate.

25 This is feasible in particular when the method further comprises a step of validating the quality of the signal representing the conformity of the biased auscultation signal. The quality of the estimated heart rate may hereby be taken into consideration when the estimated heart rate is interpreted.

30 The quality may be validated by verifying at least one of 35 the following three items:

- a) time differences between located extreme values must be within predetermined limits;
- b) minimum and maximum time differences in proportion to the mean of the time differences must be within predetermined limits;
- 5 c) the magnitude of the result of the correlation at the extreme values location must be within predetermined limits.

Then a preferred quality level may be defined by means of the preferred limits that is related directly to the statistics of rhythm estimation.

The method may comprise the step of calculating a first envelope signal representing the envelope of the A-weighted version of the auscultation signal. This is expedient because the envelope signal of the A-weighted version of the auscultation signal comprises information that is very feasible for estimating the heart rate even when murmurs are present in the auscultation signal.

20 When the method comprises the step of calculating a second envelope signal representing the envelope of the auscultation signal, the envelope signal of the auscultation signal is very feasible for estimating the heart rate 25 when murmurs are not present in the auscultation signal.

The method may further comprise the step of filtering the envelope signals by means of a band-pass filter; said band-pass filter at least having an upper and a lower 30 pass-band respectively selectable; said adaptive band-pass filter being controlled such that the lower pass-band is selected when a relatively large fraction of a signal input to the band-pass filter is low-frequent and such that the upper pass-band is selected when a relatively low fraction of a signal input to the band-pass 35 filter is low-frequent. Thus, it is possible to estimate

the rhythm in the auscultation signal over a relatively wide range of frequencies while it is avoided that the signal-to-noise ratio is ruined, i.e. it is possible preserve a relatively narrow pass-band of the band-pass filter.

The method may comprise the step of auto-scaling the envelope signals and adding the auto-scaled envelope signals in order to provide the biased auscultation signal. It is thereby possible to combine differently biased signals in order to estimate the heart rate of a broader spectrum of types of auscultation signals.

The auscultation signal may comprise samples that arrive at a sample rate and in that the method comprises synchronous steps being executed at a rate corresponding to the sample rate, and further comprising asynchronous steps being executed at time intervals that are initiated by a request. Hereby, it is possible to acquire new samples of the auscultation signal in real time while a correlation function operating on prior sample values of the auscultation signal is calculated.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The invention will be explained more fully below in connection with a preferred embodiment and with reference to the drawing, in which:

fig. 1 shows a block diagram of a processor for processing auscultation signals by means of a bias filter calculating an approximated A-weighted auscultation signal;

fig. 2 shows the expected frequency spectrum of the characteristic heart sounds, a murmur, and rumble noise;

fig. 3 shows a block diagram of a processor for calculating the beat frequency of an auscultation signal by means of a correlator;

5 fig. 4 shows a block diagram of a processor for calculating the beat frequency of an auscultation signal by means of a correlator and a bias filter comprising A-weighing;

10 fig. 5 shows an adaptive band-pass filter;

fig. 6 shows signals related to an embodiment using a correlator and a bias filter comprising A-weighing;

15 fig. 7 shows an example of the information in the envelope of the auscultation signal being insufficient;

20 fig. 8 shows an example of the information in the envelope of the A-weighted auscultation signal being insufficient.

25 Detailed Description of Preferred Embodiments

Fig. 1 shows a block diagram of a processor for processing auscultation signals by means of a bias filter calculating an approximated A-weighted auscultation signal. An auscultation signal is a signal representing the acoustical signal that may be picked up by some type of transducer located to provide an auscultation signal representing the sound of a beating heart. The auscultation signal is hereinafter denoted VCG and may be a digital or analogue signal.

30 The block diagram comprises a bias processor 106. The VCG signal is filtered in the bias filter 101. The frequency response of the filter corresponds to an approximated A-weighing of the VCG signal. A-weighing is a linear model of the human ear modelling the human perception of signal

amplitudes in the audio frequency range, i.e. about 20-20000Hz. A-weighing is typically modelled as a second order band-pass filter with a centre frequency of 2000Hz. The A-weighing model is approximated as a double differentiation of the VCG signal with respect to time thereby providing an A-weighted version, A-VCG, of the VCG signal. The approximation is valid for frequencies between about 20-200Hz. The bias filter 101 may thus be viewed as a second order high-pass filter slope. The filter thereby diminishes low frequency rumble noise that may be present in the auscultation signal. Further, the filter enhances the upper part of the frequency spectrum of the characteristic heart sounds and eventually murmurs. However, the A-weighted signal A-VCG may also enhance noise originating from sources that are not related to either the characteristic heart sounds or eventually murmurs thereby destroying the signal-to-noise-ratio. The A-weighted signal A-VCG is therefore low-pass filtered by means of the filter 102. The low-pass filtered signal is then supplied as an input signal to the rectifier 102 that calculates the absolute value of the input signal and thereby provides an output signal. The output signal from the rectifier 103 is band-pass filtered in the filter 104. This band-pass filtered signal thereby constitutes the envelope of the A-weighted signal A-VCG. The band-pass filter has a pass-band corresponding to the range of expected heart rates e.g. from 0.5 to 3.3HZ. Further, the stop-band of the band-pass filter diminishes any DC component and frequency components above the fundamental heart beat frequency, i.e. relative high frequency components.

The information in the band-pass filtered signal present as repetitive well-defined cycles is thereby representative of the heart rate. The heart rate may be estimated by means of an estimator 105. The estimator may be in the form of a peak locator determining the timing of the

well-defined extreme values of the band-pass filtered signal. Alternatively, the estimator may be in the form of a threshold or zero-crossing detector thereby generating a square signal with a frequency representing the estimated heart rate. When the estimator comprises a threshold detector, the biased auscultation signal and a threshold value are both input to a comparator. The threshold value may be in the form of a constant value or an adaptive threshold value. The adaptive threshold value may be provided by a low-pass filter filtering the biased auscultation signal.

Fig. 2 shows the expected frequency spectrum of the characteristic heart sounds, a murmur, and rumble noise. The spectrums are rough approximations and for illustration purposes only. The magnitude Amp. of the spectrums are in arbitrary units and shown as a function of the frequency F [Hz]. The frequency spectrum 301 of the characteristic heart sounds related to a contraction and an expansion of a beating heart is illustrated roughly. In the literature the sound related to a contraction is denoted S1 and the sound related to an expansion is denoted S2. The frequency spectrum of the frequency contents of S1 and S2 is primarily located between 20 and 50Hz but may be distributed up to 100-200Hz and down to below 10Hz.

However, the frequency contents of murmurs are typically distributed at higher frequencies. This is shown by the frequency response 302. The frequency contents of murmurs comprising 'musical' sounds is distributed over a relatively narrow-band frequency range 306. This relative narrow band comprises information that may be used for estimation of the heart rate. Typically, murmurs are also associated with a relative broad band 205 not comprising information regarding the heart rate. An absolute numerical definition of these frequency bands and the magni-

tudes of the auscultation signal in these bands will depend on the murmur in question.

5 The frequency spectrum 304 of low-frequent rumble noise typically overlaps the frequency spectrum 301 of the characteristic heart sounds.

10 The transfer function 303 shows a preferred transfer function for a filter for calculating a biased auscultation signal. The filter is thereby able to enhance the amplitude of the frequency components of the upper part of the frequency spectrum of the characteristic heart sounds and the amplitude of the frequency components of the frequency spectrum of murmurs. Further, low-frequency 15 rumble noise that may be present in the auscultation signal is diminished. The transfer function 303 comprises a high-pass 40 dB per decade slope. The slope may be a part of an approximated A-weighing function, where the approximation is implemented as a second order band-pass 20 filter with a centre frequency of 2000Hz.

Fig. 3 shows a block diagram of a processor for calculating the beat frequency of an auscultation signal by means of a correlator. In this embodiment the received auscultation signal VCG is a digital signal comprising digital samples arriving at a sample frequency f_s , e.g. f_s equal to 4000Hz.

25 The embodiment comprises a bias processor 201 processing the VCG samples at a rate synchronous with the sample frequency and an estimator 302 capable of operating asynchronous relative to the bias processor and providing a signal HR representative of the heart rate, when it is requested. The estimator 302 receives data in the form of 30 samples from the bias processor 301 via the buffer 303.

The buffer 303 may be in the form of a circular buffer or a first-in-first-out (FIFO) memory.

In the bias processor 301 the digital auscultation signal 5 VCG is received and the respective absolute values of the VCG signal are calculated by means of the rectifier 304. Then the absolute values are band-pass filtered by means of the filter 305 in order to calculate the envelope of the auscultation signal. The band-pass filter has a pass-band 10 corresponding to the range of expected heart rates e.g. from 0.5 to 3.3HZ. Further, the stop-band of the band-pass filter diminishes any DC component and frequency components above the fundamental heart beat frequency, i.e. relatively high frequency components.

15 Samples from the band-pass filter are supplied to the buffer 303 at even points in time. The buffers may e.g. be circular buffers that have a capacity for a number of sample points, e.g corresponding to a signal sequence of 20 5 seconds. The oldest sample in the buffer is overwritten when a new sample arrives from the band-pass filter. Samples are taken from the buffer when the estimator 302 is initiated. The estimator may be initiated at certain regular or irregular points in time e.g. in order to provide 25 information for the update of a digital display.

Although the envelope signal provided by the band-pass filter via the buffer 303 is smooth and comprises repetitive cycles it may be difficult to determine whether one 30 or more cycles are present during a specific time interval. However, the information content in the envelope signal may be enhanced towards determining the exact number of cycles in a specific time interval. This is done by calculating the conformity of the envelope signal with 35 respect to the envelope signal itself. This is based on the assumption that the vast majority of the cycles in

the envelope signal represents an actual interrelated contraction and expansion of a heart in the process of pumping blood. The conformity of the envelope signal is calculated by means of the correlator 306 calculating the 5 auto-correlation of the envelope signal.

In a preferred embodiment the correlator comprises means for selecting that cycle in the envelope signal that has the largest amplitude. This is done under the fair assumption that the largest amplitude in the auscultation 10 signal is caused by a normal contraction/expansion of the heart that is least likely to comprise any artefacts. The extent of the selected cycle is found by searching for the nearest local minima that is less than zero. Thereby, 15 falling into local minima with a magnitude greater than zero is avoided. This search for a minima is applied both forward and backward relative to the position of the largest amplitude. The selected cycle is stored and cross-correlated with the rest of the envelope signal. 20 Alternatively, convolution or any other function capable calculating the conformity of a signal with respect to the signal itself may be used.

Fig. 4 shows a block diagram of a processor for calculating 25 the beat frequency of an auscultation signal by means of a correlator and a bias filter comprising A-weighing. In this preferred embodiment the bias filter comprising A-weighing and the correlator are combined in order to obtain an enhanced overall performance, i.e. it is possible 30 to estimate the rhythm of a beating heart even though the characteristic sounds of the heart are distorted severely.

The auscultation signal VCG is in the form of a digital 35 signal comprising sample values arriving at a sample frequency f_s , e.g. $f_s = 4000\text{Hz}$. The auscultation signal is

branched. A first branch supplies the auscultation signal to a rectifier or an absolute value detector, ABS, 406. The absolute value of the auscultation signal is further supplied to the low-pass filter 407 having a cut-off frequency of about 3Hz such that frequency components above 100Hz is diminished. A second branch supplies the auscultation signal to the filter 401 in which the double derivative of the auscultation signal is calculated. The frequency response of the filter 401 corresponds to a second order high-pass slope or an A-weighing approximation in the frequency range below 2000Hz. The double derivative of the auscultation signal is supplied to a low-pass filter 402 in which the relatively high frequency noise components enhanced by the differentiation in the filter 401 is damped. The filter 402 may have a cut-off frequency of about 100Hz. The signal that is low-pass filtered by the filter 402 is supplied to a rectifier or an absolute value detector, ABS, 403. The absolute value of the auscultation signal is further supplied to the low-pass filter 407 that diminishes frequency components above 100Hz.

The decimators, DEC, 405 and 408 generate a reduced sample rate f_{sR} , that e.g. may be 200Hz since frequency components above 100Hz is diminished. Thus, the computational effort required in the succeeding signal processing of the auscultation signal may be reduced.

The band-pass filter 411 comprising the band-pass filters BPF#1 and BPF#2 receives the decimated auscultation signals and calculates band-pass filtered signals. The band-pass filter may have a pass-band corresponding to the range of expected heart rates e.g. from 0.5 to 3.3HZ. Note that DC components and frequency components above 25Hz are diminished. The centre frequency of the band-pass filter may be adjusted adaptively in order to en-

hance the performance of the rhythm estimator. This is discussed later.

5 The band-pass filtered signals thus represent the envelopes of the auscultation signal and the double differentiated auscultation signal at a reduced sample rate.

10 The decimators, DEC, 412 and 413 generate a further reduced sample rate that may be e.g. 50Hz since frequency components above 25Hz are diminished. Thus, the computational effort required in the succeeding signal processing of the auscultation signal may be reduced even further.

15 Samples from the band-pass filter are supplied to the buffers 414 and 415 at even points in time. The buffers may e.g. be circular buffers that have a capacity for a number of sample points, e.g corresponding to a signal sequence of 5 seconds. Samples are taken from the buffers 20 when the estimator 422 is initiated. The estimator may be initiated at certain regular or irregular points in time e.g. in order to provide information for the update of a digital display.

25 The samples that are taken from the buffers 414 and 415 are scaled by means of the auto-scale means 416 and 417 respectively. The auto-scale means may scale the received sample values by ensuring that the peak value over a number of scaled samples take the value 1.0, e.g. the number 30 of samples may correspond to the signal sequence stored in the buffers 414 and 415, that is the signal sequence is normalised to a peak value equal to 1.0. The scaled samples are added in the adder 418 with equal weights since the information in the two signals are of equal importance, and the result of the addition is provided as a

sum-signal. Alternatively, the two signals may be added with different weights.

5 The conformity of the sum-signal is calculated by means of the correlator, X-Corr, 419. In a preferred embodiment the correlator comprises means for selecting that cycle in the envelope signal that has the largest amplitude. The time extension of the selected cycle is found by searching for the nearest local minima that is less than 10 zero. Thereby, falling into local minima with a magnitude greater than zero is avoided. This search for a minima is applied both forward and backward relative to the position of the largest amplitude. The selected cycle is stored and cross-correlated with the rest of the envelope 15 signal.

The peak-locater 420 identifies extreme values in a signal representative of the result of the cross-correlation. This may e.g. be carried out by calculating 20 the first derivative of the result of the cross-correlation and identifying inflexions. Preferably the peak-locater identifies maximums in the signal representative of the result of the cross-correlation.

25 The locations of the extreme values are preferably processed in a quality estimator 421. The estimator decides whether the result of the cross-correlation qualifies for estimating the rhythm, if any, of the auscultation signal. The quality estimator 421 may comprise three steps 30 in the process of estimating the quality:

1. The mean of the time differences between two extreme values must be within predetermined limits;
2. The minimum and maximum time differences in proportion to the mean of the time differences must be within 35 predetermined limits;

3. The magnitude of the result of the cross-correlation at the extreme values location must be within predetermined limits.
- 5 If one or more of the above mentioned items 1-3 fail, then it is determined that it is not possible to estimate any rhythm in the auscultation signal. Alternatively, if the above mentioned items pass, then it is possible to estimate a rhythm in the auscultation signal. The rhythm 10 may be estimated by counting the number of extreme values in the result of the cross-correlation per time unit and displaying this as a number of beats per minute.

Fig. 5 shows an adaptive band-pass filter. This filter 15 may be used instead of the band-pass filter 411 shown in fig. 4. The adaptive filter may be used in estimation of the rhythm in the auscultation signal over a relatively wide range of frequencies while it is avoided that the signal-to-noise ratio is destroyed, i.e. it is possible 20 to preserve a relatively narrow pass-band of the band-pass filter.

The band-pass filter 512 receives two input signals I1 and I2 and provides two band-pass filtered output signals 25 O1 and O2. The band-pass filter 512 thus comprises two band-pass filters BPF#1 and BPF#2. Each of the filters BPF#1 and BPF#2 comprises a pass-band LB with a relatively low centre frequency and a pass-band HB with a relatively high centre frequency. One of the pass-bands 30 may be selected by supplying an enable signal to either the input LB or HB. This pass-band selection is carried out by the adaptive controller 513.

The high-pass filter 501 receives an input signal corresponding to one of the signals input to the band-pass 35 filter 512. The high-pass filter 501 has a cut-off fre-

quency of about 0.3Hz thereby diminishing very low frequency components that is not used in the adaptive pass-band selection. The filter 501 supplies a high-pass filtered signal to the low-pass filter 502. The low-pass 5 filter has a cut-off frequency of about 1Hz.

The buffers 503 and 504 are capable of storing sample values corresponding to a signal sequence with a time duration of about 3 seconds, respectively. The expected or 10 mean value of the sequences stored in the buffers are calculated by means of the mean value detectors 505 and 506. The mean value calculated by mean value detector 505 represents the mean value of the entire signal input to the band-pass filter 512. The mean value calculated by 15 mean value detector 506 represents the mean value of the low-frequency part, i.e. below about 1Hz, of the signal input to the band-pass filter 512.

Thus, the divider 507 calculates the fraction A/B of the 20 signal that is relatively low-frequent. In an initial situation the threshold Th. is equal to the value 0.45. This value is subtracted from the fraction A/B by means 25 of the adder 508. In the decision state 509 it is verified whether the frequency ratio A/B is greater than the threshold value. If this is the case (T) then the threshold value Th. is set equal to the value 0.35 and the pass-band LB having a relatively low centre frequency is selected. This is carried out under the assumption that 30 the auscultation signal originates from a slow beating heart. Thus it is possible to diminish higher and superfluous frequency components by selecting the pass-band LB having a relatively low centre frequency. Preferably, the relatively low centre frequency is about 0.7Hz.

35 Alternatively, if the frequency ratio A/B is less than the threshold value Th.(F), then the threshold value Th.

is set equal to the value 0.55 and the pass-band HB having a relatively high centre frequency is selected. This is carried out under the assumption that due to the lack of low-frequency content in the auscultation signal, the 5 auscultation is likely to originate from a very fast beating heart, e.g. from a child. By selecting the pass-band HB having a relatively high centre frequency there is maximum likelihood that the rhythm of the auscultation signal is estimated correctly. Preferably, the relatively 10 high centre frequency is about 1.2Hz.

Fig. 6 shows signals related to an embodiment using a correlator and a bias filter comprising A-weighing. The auscultation signal VCG and the corresponding band-pass 15 filtered envelope of the VCG signal is shown as a function of time. Further, the A-weighted or double differentiated auscultation signal d^2VCG/dt^2 and the corresponding band-pass filtered envelope is shown. In view of a graphical interpretation it is clear that the heart rate 20 could be estimated by using only one of the band-pass filtered signals. However, a stronger estimate is provided if the signals are added and used as input to a correlator as described above. This is shown by means of the signals 'XC-I' and 'XC-O'.
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Fig. 7 shows an example of when the information in the envelope of the auscultation signal is insufficient. The auscultation signal VCG and the corresponding band-pass filtered envelope of the VCG signal is shown as a function 30 of time. Further, the A-weighted or double differentiated auscultation signal d^2VCG/dt^2 and the corresponding band-pass filtered envelope is shown. In view of a graphical interpretation it is clear that the strongest estimate is provided by the double differentiated auscultation 35 signal d^2VCG/dt^2 . However, for the vast majority

of auscultation signals the signal 'XC-O' provides the strongest overall estimate.

Fig. 8 shows an example of when the information in the envelope of the A-weighted auscultation signal is insufficient. The auscultation signal VCG and the corresponding band-pass filtered envelope of the VCG signal is shown as a function of time. Further, the A-weighted or double differentiated auscultation signal d^2VCG/dt^2 and the corresponding band-pass filtered envelope is shown. In view of a graphical interpretation it is clear that the band-pass filtered VCG envelope signal provides the strongest estimate. But, again, the signal 'XC-O' provides the strongest overall estimate.

15

The invention may be embodied as a part of a stethoscope or any other instrument or apparatus. Alternatively, the invention may be embodied as a computer program or a part of a computer program, which may be loaded into the memory of a computer and executed therefrom. The computer program may be distributed by means of any data storage or data transmission medium. The storage media can be magnetic tape, optical disc, compact disc (CD or CD-ROM), mini-disc, hard disk, floppy disk, ferroelectric memory, electrically erasable programmable read only memory (EEPROM), flash memory, EPROM, read only memory (ROM), static random access memory (SRAM), dynamic random access memory (DRAM), ferromagnetic memory, optical storage, charge coupled devices, smart cards, etc. The transmission medium can be a network, e.g. a local area network (LAN), a wide area network (WAN), or any combination thereof, e.g. the Internet. The network may comprise wire and wire-less communication links. Via the network a software embodiment (i.e. a program) of the invention, or a part thereof, may be distributed by transferring a program via the network.

CLAIMS

1. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals, comprising

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a bias processor (106; 301; 409) for receiving an auscultation signal and providing a biased auscultation signal; said bias processor comprising an envelope detector;

10 an estimator (105; 302; 410) for calculating a signal representative of an estimated rhythm of the auscultation signal;

characterised in that,

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the estimator is adapted for selecting a part of the biased auscultation signal and measuring the conformity between the part of the biased auscultation signal and the entire auscultation signal.

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2. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 1, characterised in that the estimator calculates a cross-correlation function.

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3. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 1-2, characterised in that the part of the biased auscultation signal represents one of a succession of cycles of the biased auscultation signal.

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4. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 1-3, characterised in that the apparatus further comprises a post processor (420, 421) adapted for locating extreme values in the signal representing the conformity of the biased auscultation signal.

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5. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 4, characterised in that the post processor (420, 421) further is adapted for validating the quality of the signal representing the conformity of the
5 biased auscultation signal.
6. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 5, characterised in that the quality is validated by verifying at least of the following three
10 items:
 - a) time differences between located extreme values must be within predetermined limits;
 - b) minimum and maximum time differences in proportion to the mean of the time differences must be within predetermined limits;
 - 15 c) the magnitude of the result of the correlation at the extreme values location must be within predetermined limits.
- 20 7. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 1-6, characterised in that the bias processor comprises a filter (101; 401) for calculating an A-weighted version of the auscultation signal or an approximated A-weighted version of the auscultation signal.
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8. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 7, characterised in that the A-weighted version of the auscultation signal is calculated by means
30 of an approximation corresponding to a double differentiation of the auscultation signal.
9. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 1-8, characterised in that the bias processor comprises an envelope detector (102,103;
35 403,404) for calculating a first envelope signal repre-

senting the envelope of the A-weighted version of the auscultation signal.

10. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 1-9, characterised in that the bias processor (302; 409) comprises an envelope detector (304, 305; 406, 407) for calculating a second envelope signal representing the envelope of the auscultation signal.
- 10 11. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 9-10, characterised in that the bias processor comprises an adaptive band-pass filter (512) for filtering the envelope signals; said band-pass filter at least having an upper and a lower pass-band respectively selectable; said adaptive band-pass filter comprising a controller (513) selecting the lower pass-band when a relatively large fraction of a signal input to the band-pass filter is low-frequent and selecting the upper pass-band when a relatively low fraction of a signal input to the band-pass filter is low-frequent.
- 15 12. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 9-11, characterised in that the bias processor comprises means for combining the envelope signals or the band-pass filtered envelope signals; said means comprising auto-scaling means (416, 417) and summation means (418) providing the biased auscultation signal.
- 20 13. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 1-12, characterised in that the auscultation signal comprises samples that arrive at a sample rate and in that the apparatus comprises a synchronous processor (301; 409) operating at a rate corresponding to the sample rate, and further comprising an asynchronous

processor (302; 410) operating at time intervals that are initiated by a request.

14. An apparatus for estimating the rhythm in auscultation signals, comprising

5 a bias processor (106; 301; 409) for receiving an auscultation signal and providing a biased auscultation signal; said bias processor comprising an envelope detector;

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an estimator (105; 302; 410) for calculating a signal representative of an estimated rhythm of the auscultation signal;

15 characterised in that,

the bias processor comprises a filter (101; 401) having a frequency response corresponding to an A-weighing or an approximated A-weighing, at least for a frequency range 20 of interest.

15. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 14, characterised in that the auscultation signal is filtered with a filter (101; 401) having a 25 frequency response corresponding to a double differentiation.

16. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 14-15, characterised in that the frequency range of interest spans the frequency range below 30 2000Hz.

17. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 14-16, characterised in that the estimator 35 is adapted for selecting a part of the biased auscultation signal and measuring the conformity between the

part of the biased auscultation signal and the entire auscultation signal.

18. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 17, characterised in that the estimator 5 calculates a cross-correlation function.

19. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 17-18, characterised in that the part of 10 the biased auscultation signal represents one of a succession of cycles of the biased auscultation signal.

20. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 14-19, characterised in that the apparatus 15 further comprises a post processor (420, 421) adapted for locating extreme values in the signal representing the conformity of the biased auscultation signal.

21. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 20, characterised in that the post processor (420, 421) further is adapted for validating the 20 quality of the signal representing the conformity of the biased auscultation signal.

22. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 21, characterised in that the quality is validated by verifying at least one of the following 30 three items:

- a) time differences between located extreme values must be within predetermined limits;
- b) minimum and maximum time differences in proportion to the mean of the time differences must be within predetermined limits;
- c) the magnitude of the result of the correlation at the 35 extreme values location must be within predetermined limits.

23. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 14-22, characterised in that the bias processor comprises an envelope detector (102,103; 5 403,404) for calculating a first envelope signal representing the envelope of the A-weighted version of the auscultation signal.

24. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 14-23, characterised in that the bias processor comprises an envelope detector (304,305; 10 406,407) for calculating a second envelope signal representing the envelope of the auscultation signal.

25. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 23-24, characterised in that the bias processor comprises an adaptive band-pass filter (512) for filtering the envelope signals; said band-pass filter at least having an upper and a lower pass-band respectively selectable; said adaptive band-pass filter comprising a controller (513) selecting the lower pass-band when a relatively large fraction of a signal input to the band-pass filter is low-frequent and selecting the upper pass-band when a relatively low fraction of a signal input to the band-pass filter is low-frequent. 15 20 25

26. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 24-25, characterised in that the bias processor comprises means for combining the envelope signals or the band-pass filtered envelope signals; said means comprising auto-scaling means (416, 417) and summation means (418) providing the biased auscultation signal. 30

27. An apparatus for processing auscultation signals according to claim 14-26, characterised in that the auscul- 35

tation signal comprises samples that arrive at a sample rate and in that the apparatus comprises a synchronous processor (301; 409) operating at a rate corresponding to the sample rate, and further comprising an asynchronous processor (302; 410) operating at time intervals that are initiated by a request.

28. A method for processing auscultation signals, comprising the steps of

10 receiving an auscultation signal and providing a biased auscultation signal;

15 calculating a signal representative of an estimated rhythm of the auscultation signal;

characterised in that,

20 the estimated rhythm is calculated by selecting a part of the biased auscultation signal and measuring the conformity between the part of the biased auscultation signal and the entire auscultation signal.

25 29. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 28, characterised in that the estimator calculates a cross-correlation function.

30 30. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 28-29, characterised in that the part of the biased auscultation signal represents one of a succession of cycles of the biased auscultation signal.

35 31. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 28-30, characterised in that the method further comprises the step of locating extreme values in the

signal representing the conformity of the biased auscultation signal.

32. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 31, characterised in that the method further

comprises the step of validating the quality of the signal representing the conformity of the biased auscultation signal.

10 33. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 32, characterised in that the quality is validated by verifying at least one of the following three items:

15 a) time differences between located extreme values must be within predetermined limits;

b) minimum and maximum time differences in proportion to the mean of the time differences must be within predetermined limits;

20 c) the magnitude of the result of the correlation at the extreme values location must be within predetermined limits.

34. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 28-33, characterised in that the method further comprises a step of calculating an A-weighted version of the auscultation signal or an approximated A-weighted version of the auscultation signal.

30 35. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 34, characterised in that the A-weighted version of the auscultation signal is calculated by means of an approximation corresponding to a double differentiation of the auscultation signal.

35 36. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 28-35, characterised in that the method fur-

ther comprises the step of calculating a first envelope signal representing the envelope of the A-weighted version of the auscultation signal.

5 37. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 28-36, characterised in that the method further comprises the step of calculating a second envelope signal representing the envelope of the auscultation signal.

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38. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 36-37, characterised in that the method further comprises the step of filtering the envelope signals by means of a band-pass filter; said band-pass filter at 15 least having an upper and a lower pass-band respectively selectable; said adaptive band-pass filter being controlled such that the lower pass-band is selected when a relatively large fraction of a signal input to the band-pass filter is low-frequent and such that the upper pass-20 band is selected when a relatively low fraction of a signal input to the band-pass filter is low-frequent.

39. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 36-38, characterised in that the method further comprises the steps of auto-scaling the envelope signals and adding the auto-scaled envelope signals in 25 order provide the biased auscultation signal.

40. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 28-39, characterised in that the auscultation signal comprises samples that arrive at a sample rate and in that the method comprises synchronous steps being executed at a rate corresponding to the sample rate, and further comprising asynchronous steps operating 35 at time intervals that are initiated by a request.

41. A method for estimating the rhythm in auscultation signals, comprising the steps of

receiving an auscultation signal and providing a biased auscultation signal;

5 calculating a signal representative of an estimated rhythm of the auscultation signal;

10 characterised in that,

the signal representative of the estimated rhythm is calculated by means of a filter having a frequency response corresponding to an A-weighing or an approximated A-weighing, at least for a frequency range of interest.

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42. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 41, characterised in that the frequency response is obtained by means of a double differentiation.

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43. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 41-42, characterised in that the frequency range of interest spans the frequency range below 2000Hz.

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44. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 41-43, characterised in that the method comprises the step of selecting a part of the biased auscultation signal and measuring the conformity between the part of the biased auscultation signal and the entire auscultation signal.

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45. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 44, characterised in that the method calculates a cross-correlation function.

46. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 44-45, characterised in that the part of the biased auscultation signal represents one of a succession of cycles of the biased auscultation signal.

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47. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 41-46, characterised in that the method further comprises a step of locating extreme values in the signal representing the conformity of the biased auscultation signal.

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48. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 47, characterised in that the method further comprises a step of validating the quality of the signal representing the conformity of the biased auscultation signal.

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49. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 48, characterised in that the quality is validated by verifying at least one of the following three items:

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- a) time differences between located extreme values must be within predetermined limits;
- b) minimum and maximum time differences in proportion to the mean of the time differences must be within predetermined limits;
- c) the magnitude of the result of the correlation at the extreme values location must be within predetermined limits.

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50. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 41-49, characterised in that the method comprises the step of calculating a first envelope signal representing the envelope of the A-weighted version of the auscultation signal.

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51. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 41-50, characterised in that the method comprises the step of calculating a second envelope signal
5 representing the envelope of the auscultation signal.

52. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 50-51, characterised in that the method further comprises the step of filtering the envelope signals
10 by means of a band-pass filter; said band-pass filter at least having an upper and a lower pass-band respectively selectable; said adaptive band-pass filter being controlled such that the lower pass-band is selected when a relatively large fraction of a signal input to the band-
15 pass filter is low-frequent and such that the upper pass-band is selected when a relatively low fraction of a signal input to the band-pass filter is low-frequent.

53. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 51-52, characterised in that the method comprises the step of auto-scaling the envelope signals and adding the auto-scaled envelope signals in order to provide the biased auscultation signal.
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25 54. A method for processing auscultation signals according to claim 41-53, characterised in that the auscultation signal comprises samples that arrive at a sample rate and in that the method comprises synchronous steps being executed at a rate corresponding to the sample rate, and further comprising asynchronous steps being executed at time intervals that are initiated by a request.
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ABSTRACT

An apparatus for processing auscultation signals, e.g. embedded in an electronic stethoscope with a digital 5 readout of an estimated heart rate. The apparatus comprises a bias processor for receiving an auscultation signal and providing a biased auscultation signal; said bias processor comprising an envelope detector and an estimator for calculating a signal representative of the 10 beat frequency of the auscultation signal. In one aspect the information in the biased auscultation signal that is in conformity with the repeated information in the auscultation signal is enhanced. This may e.g. be done by calculating a cross-correlation between the biased auscultation signal and a part of the biased auscultation signal. In another aspect of the invention the auscultation signal is biased by means of A-weighing. Preferably 15 the two aspects of the invention are combined.

20 Fig. 4 should be published.